

## **To Be Thwarted by a King by Starkindler**

Posted: Found as a capture on the Wayback Machine

Canon: The Hobbit

Pairing: Thorin Oakenshield/Bilbo Baggins

Rating: General [G]

Word Count: 7,473

Summary: After some soul searching, Bilbo decides to stay in Erebor. He expects everyone to be happy, but what he doesn't expect is to find out Thorin has been thwarting every potential suitor he has.

He hadn't planned on staying in Erebor. Even after the battle outside the gates was over, and he and Thorin reconciled, he had planned on leaving, once Thorin and his nephews were well. He did miss his chair by the fireplace, and his books, and his garden. He missed his pillows and his mother's quilts.

But things had a way of changing. The Dwarves, knowing how much he had desired to go home throughout the journey were very understanding, and they did not ask him to stay.

It did not mean that they wished for him to leave. And it was something he learned in a hard and most heartbreaking way.

While the others were healing and even a little while after – the Misty Mountains would not be passable for months yet, so he'd had some time before he had to arrive at Beorn's, and was not in a rush – he had been helping with the assessment of what needed to be done to make Erebor fully liveable once again. His job was to go through each of the residences, making lists of what was good in them, what needed to be replaced, the layout of the chambers, and the amount of cleaning that needed to be done.

It was closer to when he planned on leaving that he wound up on a hallway in the royal halls, where there was a small but wide-open terrace. Smiling to himself, he'd headed toward it, intent on getting a bit of sun, when the sound of loud sobs slowed his steps.

Not wanting to intrude, but wanting to know who it was that was so upset, he tiptoed his way over to one of the openings and peered outside.

Fíli and Kíli were sitting on a bench, not all that far away. Kíli's shoulders were shaking and he was leaning against Fíli, who was stroking his arm and resting his cheek on his brother's head.

"Kíli, it will be all right," Fíli murmured.

"I don't want him to go, and he leaves in four days!" Kíli said, his hand lifting to rub against his nose. "You know we'll never see him again."

"How do you know that?"

"Because once he gets back to his home, he'll never come back. And we'll never get to go and see him again, because we'll be too busy with everything Uncle piles on top of us. You know it, too!" Kíli released a shuddering breath. "No one has ever treated us the way he does."

"I know, but Amad and Thorin love us. You know it as well as I do." Fíli kissed the top of his brother's head. "They might not be demonstrative, but they care about us."

"Yes, I know, but Bilbo treats us like Dori always treated Ori, and Ori may act like it irritates him, but we both know he loves that his brother shows how much he cares. Amad and Thorin have always been sparse with their affections even though they love us..." Kíli sniffled. "I like the way Bilbo lets us curl up next to him, or rest our heads on his leg, and the way he strokes our hair. The way he stands up to Thorin when he thinks Thorin is being too hard on us."

Kíli sniffled, and Bilbo was struck once again by how young Kíli actually was. "Dwalin said Bilbo is the way Adad was when he was still alive. You know we never had a proper father, not really, and Bilbo treats us like we're his own, and he never looks like he's disappointed in us, even if he might not like something we do. Who is going to look out for us when he goes away? Who is

going to look out for him? He's going back with only Gandalf, and you know how treacherous the roads can be. What if he doesn't make it home?"

"I don't want him to go anymore than you do. None of us want him to leave, but we cannot force him to stay," Fili said, tears slipping down his own face. "If we could make him stay, I'd be first in line to try, with you and Uncle right behind me."

Kíli's laugh was watery. "With Dwalin and Balin trying to shove their way past everyone."

"True. But he's made it plain he doesn't want to be here. What would you have us do? He misses the green and his gardens."

"We have those chambers here in the royal wing just down the way with that huge terrace with all the gardens and the hothouse. It's set up for irrigation and everything. Just needs new soil and plants," Kíli said softly.

"He misses his Hobbit hole and all of his things. His father's armchair, and his mother's dishes."

"His things could be brought here. Gandalf could go and get them, send them with the spring caravans from Ered Luin. They'll go right through the Shire on the East Road," Kíli protested.

"He wants to be with his own people, his family," Fili said.

Kíli sniffled again. "I thought we were his family. He's ours. "

"Maybe he doesn't feel the same way, at least not enough to stay," Fíli said, wrapping his other arm around his brother and burying his face in Kíli's hair.

"Think Dori will let us run to him and hide when Uncle and Amad choose Dwarrows we cannot stand to marry and continue the family line?" Kíli asked, sounding much like his age.

Fíli snorted. "Even he would be too afraid to stand up to them. We'll have to figure it out for ourselves." He sighed and raised his head, turning it to look out over the scenery. "Now, push down your sadness. We have our roles to play as the Princes of Erebor, and crying like little children is not acceptable. And we do not want to make Bilbo sad for wanting to go home. We're not his responsibility, and he should not be made to feel guilty, no matter how much we may love him."

"We still are considered children," Kíli reminded him, but he sat up and rubbed at his eyes. "I haven't even grown a proper beard, and we have at least thirty more years before they even remotely consider us adults, even if we're full grown now."

Then he patted down his hair. "But I'll be good, and I won't make Bilbo feel bad. I promise."

"Good," Fíli said, kissing his brother's temple and then standing up, pulling Kíli up with him. "We should go and see what tasks Uncle has for us today."

Kíli groaned and allowed his brother to tug him toward the door. "Likely more classes on proper behavior and etiquette for dealing with foreign diplomats with Balin. It's so boring."

"We are the Heirs of Durin," Fíli said, slinging an arm around his brother's shoulders. "I fear we are to spend most of our lives dealing with the very dull aspects of ruling."

Kíli snorted and slid an arm around his brother's waist, and the two left to find Thorin.

Bilbo came out of his hiding place, tears streaming down his face, and he went to sit on the bench that Kíli and Fíli just vacated. The stone was still warm from their body heat.

He'd known that the Dwarves of Thorin's Company had cared for him, but he'd never known how deeply. And Fíli and Kíli were right in thinking that he'd come to love them as if they were his own. He just hadn't realized they'd loved him just as much.

Listening to the two of them had cut straight into his heart. He never thought his leaving would have affected them in such a way. He knew they'd probably be a little sad, but that soon enough they would forget him. After all, who was he in the grand scheme of things? He was just a small, simple Hobbit, not someone prone to great deeds or being a leader of great peoples. He wasn't one to make the difficult decisions, to sacrifice himself for others.

And it hurt that they felt they had to hide their sorrow from him. He'd never wanted to hurt them in such a way, or make them feel they couldn't show him how they truly felt.

Wiping his face, he wandered over to the edge of the small terrace, looking around at what once was probably lush greenery but was now the barren wasteland of Smaug's doing. He knew the ground beneath was still rich with life, and that with a little love and a lot of work, it could be renewed.

He turned toward the left side of the terrace and his eyebrows shot up when he saw a vast terrace not too far away from where he was now. It was massive, and it had several raised sections within the stone floor. There was also a massive building on the far side, a smaller one sitting right next to it.

Curious, he went back to the halls and gathered his things, and he followed the second hall until he came to a suite of rooms that were flooded with light. Creeping inside, he made his way through the dank room to the outer doors of what was indeed a massive terrace.

So this was the garden that Kili spoke of, he thought to himself as he wandered outside, looking around. The raised areas were actually large raised garden beds, some of them big enough for sizeable crops or trees.

He wandered around until he got to the buildings. One was a little damaged, but fixable, and inside were many garden tools, most of them still in fine shape and clearly of Dwarf-make.

The enormous building was the hothouse. Several panels of the building were broken, and it was clear that the life within them had grown wild before dying out, from freezing and lack of water, no doubt, but it would be easy enough to repair.

Bilbo wandered back out of the hothouse and went to sit on one of the stone benches, mind filling with what could be done with such a garden space.

After a few minutes he sighed and wandered over to the terrace wall, leaning against it and looking out in the distance. Could he truly be so unhappy here? What was left for him in the Shire?

Family? Bilbo snorted. The only family he was remotely close to was Drogo Baggins, and he was barely starting his own family, and would not have time for a bachelor cousin. The Took all lived too far away to be truly close to him. The other Bagginses would think him the oddest creature after this adventure and stay away from him, as would most Hobbits. He knew exactly what they would be calling him. 'Mad Baggins' they would say, whispering behind his back.

But here...here he had a family of his own making, who appreciated him for who he was and who loved him enough to let him go, if that was what he truly wanted.

And was it what he wanted? Really? Kili was right. He could send letters. It wasn't as though he did not have his paperwork on file, with everything going to Drogo. He would make sure that no one thwarted Gandalf when it came to getting the things he would not wish to live without. And

he could send for seeds for all kinds of plants. Flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Seeds for trees and berry bushes.

His father's armchair could find a place just as cozy in front of a fireplace here as it did in Bag End. Though a room may have stone walls rather than wood, did not mean it could not be made homey and Hobbity. His mother's dishes could be used just as well here as in Bag End. His mother's quilt and his pillows would be just as comfy and warm here.

True, he would miss the rolling hills of his homeland, but there were rolling hills outside the Mountain. They were a little bare, but as he'd thought earlier, it just needed a bit of work and a lot of love. And some replanting of seeds and saplings. He thought, perhaps, Elrond might be willing to aid him in that. Surely the Elves, who had a love of living things as deeply as the Hobbits, would know how to make things green again.

He moved back to the bench and had no idea how long he sat there, before a familiar grey-clad wizard sat down next to him. "Gandalf."

"Bilbo. I see you found the Garden Room. Thorin told me it was built for a Queen long, long ago who had the love of greenery and growing things that would rival a Hobbit," he said, pulling his pipe out of his coat pocket.

"I'm certain they would be magnificent and very beautiful once they were restored," Bilbo murmured.

"Thorin would give them to you gladly, should you stay."

Bilbo eyed Gandalf shrewdly and smiled a bit. "How do you do that?"

"Do what, my boy?" Gandalf asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Know what others are thinking. How do you know I was considering staying?" Bilbo asked, shifting so he could look at Gandalf without getting a crick in his neck.

"Because I know how you feel about them, Bilbo. You may have been surrounded by Hobbits, but you were alone in the Shire, and very lonely. I've watched firsthand how this journey changed you, and for the better, if you ask me. You love them all, and they you. Do you really wish to leave your family here, for one that will never come close to meaning so much to you?"

Bilbo shook his head, blinking away his tears. "I saw Kíli and Fíli crying over me earlier. I didn't know how they felt about my leaving. I did not think I was so important to them."

"You mean the world to them. They are young, and they not only want you with them, but I think they need you. Thorin needs you as well, to remind him that there are more important things than gold and jewels, and running oneself ragged trying to run a kingdom. He needs to remember that family is the most important thing, and friends, and the welfare of his people. You give all of them so much, and I think they give as much to you in return," Gandalf said, smiling down at him.

"As for your things, I will be more than happy to fetch whatever you wish for me to bring. I have some Ranger friends I can ask to help, and I'm certain I can convince an Elf or two if need be."

"You don't think the other Dwarves not of the Company will find it odd, my living here?" Bilbo asked. He truly did not want to make it difficult for Thorin or the others, having one who was not of their people living with them.

"Already they sing of your heroics in song as they work," Gandalf said, chuckling when Bilbo went wide-eyed and his face flushed. "No one told you?"

Bilbo huffed. "No! I am just a simple Hobbit. Nothing special."



"I think they would all disagree with you," Gandalf said. "You are a hero of Dwarves. I suspect you already have many who adore you."

"Ridiculous." Bilbo stuck his hands in his pocket, frowning when his fingers touched a smooth, round object. "Huh," he said, pulling out the little magic ring. "I had forgotten about this. Well, I don't believe I will be needing this. Perhaps you can find someone else in need of an invisibility ring. Somehow, I don't think the Dwarves would appreciate me disappearing on them once I tell them I'll be staying."

Gandalf pulled out a small sack from a pocket and opened it, letting Bilbo drop the ring into it. "I do believe I will leave it in Rivendell, and do a bit of research on magic rings. Wouldn't want it to end up in the wrong hands." Gandalf slipped it back into his pocket, and then continued on with smoking his pipe.

"Do you think if I write to Elrond, he'll help me with figuring out how to restore the grounds around the Lonely Mountain? The area would be beautiful with some wildflowers, bushes, and trees, and some soft fields of grass."

"I think he would indeed. Write to him, and I will speak with him as well."

"All right," Bilbo said, standing up and stretching. "I do have a bit of work to do, and then I will go and find Thorin. I suspect I should make sure I'm welcome before I tell anyone else of my plans."

Gandalf chuckled and then blew out smoke in the shape of a ship. "I think there is little that Thorin would deny you. You a place here in Erebor is not one of them."

Picking up his tools, Bilbo and Gandalf walked out of the rooms and went their separate ways, Bilbo returning to the place where he'd planned on beginning his work.

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Later that afternoon, Bilbo found Thorin in his council room, sitting at the table, going through paperwork. He was alone.

"Thorin?"

Thorin's eyes warmed when he saw him at the door. "Bilbo! Come in, please. Save me from this paperwork. While I am glad to have our Mountain back, the paperwork involved is dreadfully dull," he said, setting aside the papers.

Bilbo chuckled at that. "Bureaucracy is the bane of any form of government, I think. And dull as watching paint dry."

"It is at that. What can I do for you?" he asked, giving Bilbo his full attention.

Bilbo climbed into the chair next to him and bit his lip. "I wanted to ask you something." When Thorin's eyebrows rose, he took a deep breath. "I've been...rethinking my desire to return to the Shire." When Thorin didn't say anything, simply looked surprised, he slid off the chair and began pacing.

"I started thinking about what really was left for me there. I don't have very much in the way of close family, and those I do hold dear have their own families now. I've lost all respectability in the eyes of other Hobbits. I know what they'll call me. 'Mad Baggins', they'll say. They already thought me odd enough because my mother was a Took, and besides, I only have what? Forty years left, possibly less, before I would have to leave anyway?"

"Why would you have to leave?" Thorin asked, sitting back.

"Stupid Elvish blood. Some fool of a Took mated with an Elf way back centuries ago, and the more Hobbit ones married back into the Hobbit lines. My mother comes from the fairy line, as the Tooks call it. I'll live another hundred or hundred and fifty years, unless I marry. Inherited that blasted fading thing as well, and if my partner dies before me, I will follow soon after. Probably a blessing in disguise, but I've never desired to marry a Hobbit because of it."

Bilbo sighed. "So what does that leave me there? Gardens and my things? A garden can be remade here just as easily as there, and my things can be transported here in wagons." He looked over at Thorin. "I made a new family on the journey, and now that my time to leave has come, I find myself extremely reluctant to leave. So I suppose my question is, would you be willing to allow me to stay?"

Thorin smiled and stood up, coming over to him and pulling him into his warm, tight embrace. "You have always been welcome here, Bilbo Baggins. None of us have wanted to see you leave. We only kept our wishes to ourselves because you were so intent to get back home." Thorin stepped back, though he kept his hands on Bilbo's shoulders. "There are a set of rooms in the royal wings I think will be perfect for you."

"You mean the one with the garden terrace and the hothouse?" he asked, smiling when Thorin looked surprised. "I was working up there today, and I discovered them. It's a beautiful terrace, and I thought the chambers were lovely. It has a massive kitchen, which I loved."

"Then they are yours. Thorin cupped his cheeks and smiled as he pressed a kiss to his forehead. "I am very happy you decided to stay."

"So am I," Bilbo said, hugging him again. Then he pulled back and sighed. "I have so many letters to write. Can I sit in here with you?"

Thorin nodded and guided him back to the seat next to him. "I would be glad for the company. Balin fled when he saw the stack of papers I had to go through. He is most disloyal."

Bilbo laughed as he reached for a stack of blank parchment, a quill, and a bottle of ink. "Assign him to work on the treaties with the Woodland Realm. That will teach him to flee paperwork."

Thorin laughed loudly, and Bilbo set to work with a large grin on his face.

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By dinner, Bilbo had gotten all his letters and lists in order and ready for Gandalf to take with him. Gandalf was intent on leaving the next day, deciding that he would be taking a horse and heading toward the Gap of Rohan, going around the Misty Mountains so that he would reach Rivendell much earlier than the way he planned on going with Bilbo. While Bilbo would miss the meddling old wizard, he was happy to know that Gandalf would reach the Shire much sooner than expected.

The others still didn't know that Bilbo was staying, and the crestfallen looks on Fíli and Kíli's faces when Gandalf announced he would be starting the journey back to Rivendell the next day had Bilbo's heart clenching painfully.

"It's really a good thing," he said to Fíli and Kíli. "Gandalf will reach Rivendell much sooner, and won't have to worry about going through the passes of the Misty Mountains alone."

Fíli and Kíli, and all the Dwarves save Thorin looked at him in confusion. "But, you are going with him, are you not?" Fíli asked, his brows furrowing.

Bilbo poked at his venison. "No. I've decided that I will remain here, and Thorin has agreed. I'll be living here in Erebor from now on."

He couldn't help but laugh as Kíli flew from his seat and around the table, dragging Bilbo out of his chair and began twirling around while holding him in a bear hug. "Kíli, put me down. I would like to eat before my food gets cold."

Kíli put him down only to give him a light headbutt and then spin him into Fíli's arms, and he did the same. A few minutes passed as the rest of his companions came over and made their pleasure at his decision known.

"All right, everyone, let the Hobbit eat," Thorin said, chuckling and shaking his head at their antics. "He will be here for many years to come. You can manage to wait to smother him until after dinner."

Everyone returned to their seats, and Fíli addressed him. "What about your home? Your gardens? Your things?"

Bilbo shrugged. "I can make my home here just as easily. Gandalf will be returning for my things, and Thorin has promised me a set of rooms where I can make a garden far more grand than anything I could have had in the Shire."

"What of your family?" Kíli asked.

Bilbo smiled at him. "I have kin there, but only a very few are dear to me, and they have their own lives. You, all of you, are my family now, one I chose, and was not simply born to."

Kíli beamed at him, his eyes shining with tears. "Thank you for staying with us. We would have missed you terribly."

Bilbo laughed. "We'll see how you feel once the traders get here, and you have to help me with purchases. After all, we do have a kingdom to put back together."

Kíli groaned but his eyes danced with humor. "Do I have to?"

"Either that, or you can study your etiquette in dealing with the Elven Realms," Balin said, raising an eyebrow at him.

"We'll help Bilbo," Fíli said, smacking his brother lightly in the arm.

Thorin looked at Bilbo and raised an eyebrow as his nephews started bickering and shoving at one another. "Are you certain you do not wish to leave. I may be tempted to go with you."

At that Bilbo grinned. "I think I can handle your nephews. I'll take my chances."

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The first time a Dwarf outside the Company tried to befriend Bilbo was after the traders from Rohan and Gondor arrived. It was rather late in the year for traders to come so far up North, but the lure of gold and the promise of many purchases proved to be a huge draw, and large caravans made it up to rest between Dale and Erebor.

The entire Company and many Dwarves who volunteered to stay in Erebor until their people from Ered Luin and other places could return to the Mountain found themselves in the markets that cropped up as soon as the first wagons started to arrive. Thorin had assigned several Dwarves to Bilbo, Fíli, and Kíli, who had their own personal lists, as well as many lists for the entire Mountain, as they were responsible for gathering goods for the kitchens, for cleaning, and for sewing.

Bilbo had thought Fíli and Kíli would have been disgruntled about their assignment, but they seemed content enough to plaster themselves to him for the next several days at least.

The Dwarf's name was Marin. He was tall, about the same height as Dwalin, with long, thick black hair, and a black beard to match, though it was immaculately braided, their ends clipped with lovely silver beads. He was wide and strong, and handsome. Not in the way that Thorin, Fíli, and Kíli were handsome, but more like Dwalin, where their strength and warrior-like demeanor was half the attraction. He was also like Dwalin in that in spite of his gruff ways, he was a kind Dwarf, and he seemed to enjoy speaking with Bilbo.

For two days, they had many an excellent chat, and Bilbo had even joined him for lunch one day. But on the third day, he found that those accompanying him had been switched around, and Marin seemed to be on a schedule opposite that of Bilbo's.

Bilbo shrugged it off, thinking that eventually Marin's schedule would be changed again at some point, and they could resume what he hoped would be a friendship. It would be nice to make friends with others in the Mountain.

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The next Dwarf who attempted to befriend Bilbo was a kind scribe by the name of Nari. From what he understood, he was a distant relation of Dori's family, one who lived in the Iron Hills, and he'd come with many others a few weeks after the battle. He was a sweet young man, and very shy. But he seemed to love Bilbo's tales of their quest, and he was fascinated by the Shire, asking many questions, everything from hobbies, gift-giving practices, and courtship rituals.

He also began helping Bilbo learn of the ways of the Dwarves, including courtship and friendship rituals, which Bilbo had begun researching as soon as he decided to stay. Strangely enough, both friendship and courtship rituals began with the presenting of beads, and intent determined which of the two it was.

Bilbo thought it was sweet when Nari gave him what was clearly a friendship bead, which Bilbo gladly accepted. What was puzzling, however, was that before Bilbo could procure a friendship bead of his own to give, Nari suddenly found other places to be, and nearly fled in fear any time Bilbo got near.

Dori and Ori both told Bilbo that it was not of his doing, that Nari was a strange, extremely shy fellow, and he likely frightened himself by being so forward as to give a bead to a hero of Dwarves, and to give the boy time. He would come to his senses eventually.

Bilbo had frowned, but then shrugged it off. Dwarves and their ways, after all, were still rather strange to him.

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The third Dwarf to come into his life, Hanar, clearly had amorous intentions. He was an extremely handsome, rather charismatic Dwarf. He was a member of the Jeweler's Guild in the Iron Hills, and had volunteered to stay in Erebor and help them with getting the Jewel mines up and running again, so they would be ready for those who would be returning to the Mountain permanently.

The bead Hanar gave him was clearly meant to be his intent to start courtship. Bilbo knew enough about Dwarvish courtships now to know that refusing it would be incredibly rude, but to refuse him, he only had to let the time for acknowledging the gesture formally expire.

There was something about the Dwarf that did not sit quite right with Bilbo, so he'd decided immediately that he would not encourage this one to continue on with a courtship.



He was proven right when Dwalin brought the Dwarf in front of Thorin's throne three days later, with evidence that he was stealing from Erebor's mines, and Bilbo guessed that he was trying to court him to gain a better place in Erebor.

Bilbo was not quite sure what Hanar's punishment was. All he knew was the Dwarf was gone, and he had no qualms whatsoever about taking Hanar's bead and throwing it from his balcony, as far as his arm could manage.

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It was, however, with the fourth, fifth, and sixth Dwarves that a pattern truly began to emerge. All of them were male, handsome, and Masters in their own chosen crafts. Any of them would likely have made a fine spouse, though it was never something Bilbo could have discovered for himself. For, no sooner had they shown their interest, then suddenly they would lose interest.

If it were simply the changing of their mind, Bilbo would have thought nothing of it. But each of the three had looked terrified to be seen talking to him.

The seventh, however, was the last straw. Dáin had returned, along with his son, Thorin III, for a visit, along with more who wished to come and help, and some supplies they needed. Along with them came a guard named Finn. He was easily the most handsome Dwarf Bilbo had ever laid eyes upon, even handsomer than Thorin (and Bilbo had not thought that possible). He was built like Dwalin, and he was kind like Balin, very intelligent, and something of a flirt.

He had apparently heard of Bilbo's contributions to the reclamation of Erebor, and as his family had been from Erebor – he himself had been born in the Iron Hills – he had bade Dáin to let him come along as part of his guard, so that he may meet the Hobbit that had many a Dwarf fascinated and singing of him in song.

Bilbo wasn't necessarily interested in the Dwarf for a lifelong commitment...at least not yet. He thought he might, given time, but like the others, soon enough, Finn had distanced himself from Bilbo, looking distressed whenever Bilbo tried to talk to him.

Finally, Bilbo had had enough, and one morning, early and long before most were milling about for work, he managed to corner Finn on the very terrace he had seen Fili and Kili sitting in months ago.

"Finn," Bilbo said, raising an eyebrow when his eyes darted around, looking for who knew what. Perhaps an escape route. "I would like to talk with you."

After a few moments, Finn nodded and sat down, though he was clearly uncomfortable.

Bilbo sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose between his right thumb and forefinger. "I would like to know just what is going on. I thought we were becoming friends, and then suddenly, you're all but running down the hall, screaming, any time I come near. What I want to know is: why?"

"Because this has happened to me several times over the last few months. Every Dwarf outside my original companions I try to befriend inevitably ends up out of reach or runs away from me. All of them look terrified. So, why?"

Finn cleared his throat. "I would rather not say."

"Well, I would rather you did, because this is getting old, and I am sick of it. I want to make friends, and if I am doing something wrong or inappropriate, I should like to know so that I can cease whatever behavior seems to be offending everyone so."

Finn snorted and shook his head. "It is not you, Master Baggins. Ease your mind. You have done nothing wrong."

"Then what is it? I don't understand."

"It's Thorin," a voice from the doorway of the terrace said, and Bilbo turned to find Dáin standing there, looking rather amused. The Dwarf-lord glanced over at Finn. "You may flee and save yourself from the King's wrath. I will inform the Hobbit of what is transpiring."

Finn, looking relieved and grateful, all but ran from the terrace, and Bilbo frowned after him. Then he turned to watch Dáin walk over and sit next to him. "What's this about Thorin?"

Dáin chuckled. "Thorin, so I've been told, has been warning off all potential suitors for your hand, whether real or imagined. Those who offer honest friendship and nothing more have been caught in the crossfire. Many more Dwarves than you are aware of have been warned away from trying for your hand."

Bilbo scowled and his eyes narrowed in to slits. "That...that...what I want to say I cannot say aloud about my king, but I assure you, it is not something fit for even the most vulgar of company," Bilbo said, huffing loudly. "How dare he do that to me? I thought it was me! I thought I was doing something wrong!"

Then he deflated. "Poor Nari. He only wanted friendship. How Thorin must have terrified him."

"Yes, he is a kind but timid soul, and I do believe he would be a great friend to you," Dáin said.

Jumping up, Bilbo began pacing. "Oh, that Dwarf! I could skin him alive and feed him to Mountain Trolls! Do you know where he is?"

"As far as I know, he's in the royal dining hall. We are supposed to meet for breakfast, along with most of your companions, but I do think I'll stay here in safety, as I prefer not to be a meal for a Mountain Troll," Dáin said, grinning at him. "Why don't you go and give him a piece of your mind? Oh, and be sure to ask him why he keeps sabotaging your potential relationships, why he feels the need to do so."

Nodding, Bilbo stormed down to the dining hall and threw open the doors to the royal dining hall. All of the company save Bombur, who was likely finishing up breakfast in the kitchen, was sitting at the table, talking amongst themselves.

"Thorin Oakenshield!" Bilbo roared, hands on hips as he stood there and glared at the Dwarf-king.

"Is something the matter?" Thorin asked him, frowning.

"Yes, there most certainly is something the matter! It has come to my attention that over the last several months, it has been you who has been sabotaging all of my potential friendships, and you who has been warning off any potential suitors. You have some explaining to do!" Bilbo, as he said this, stalked forward until he was eye to eye with the King of Erebor.

Kíli and Fíli exchanged glances and slid half under the table. "This is going to be ugly," Kíli murmured.

"Domestics always are," Nori muttered, eying the door. "Should we flee while we have the chance?"

"Speak for yourself," Glóin said. "I want to see what happens."

"You do not know our ways well yet, Bilbo," Thorin said as he set his cup of tea down, attempting to sound reasonable. "It is not wise for them to try to approach you for courtship when you know not how to respond or what is expected of you."

"Bollocks!" Bilbo snapped, glaring at him. "I started learning the ways of Dwarvish courtship and friendship rituals before the first one of them ever showed any intentions toward me. I found learning your ways of utmost importance since I decided to live here. And if it was you simply telling them to wait, they wouldn't be running away from me or looking terrified if I even look in their direction!"

"I tell you again: explain yourself! Why are you sabotaging any relationships I might make, whether friendship or otherwise?" Bilbo scowled at him. "Tell me now, Thorin Oakenshield, or so help me, I will walk out those gates before this day is through and not return. I'll go and live with Thranduil!"

Thorin flinched at that and sighed. "Because none of them were good enough for you. You deserved far better than any of them. You deserve the best, one who can make your heart sing, one who would give you everything and give up everything to make you happy. You deserve the only one who can love you the way you should be loved."

"And you think you're qualified to decide who that is for me, Thorin? I may seem young according to your people's reckoning, but I have been an adult for nearly twenty years. Do not think me for a fool, or that I don't know my own mind."

"And tell me: what was wrong with Marin? Why was he not suitable as a friend? He had found his One and had no romantic interest in me, nor I him, and yet, you punished him by putting him on the night shifts, so we could not converse."

"Then there was poor Nari. He's terrified to come near me now. He is a kind sweet boy, not even old enough to court, but old enough to offer genuine friendship, and I am entirely certain you hurt his feelings. You owe him the biggest apology you can muster...and a few apology gifts, I'd wager."

"I really couldn't care less about Hanar, even if he hadn't turned out to be here solely to steal from you, and I likely would not have taken most of the suitors seriously, since I know full well many are enamored by what they deem my heroics because of those stories everyone insists upon spreading far and wide, and those bloody songs you think I don't know about. But Finn is kind, and smart, and handsome, and he holds a valued position as one of Dáin's guards. Tell me, what is wrong with him as a suitor? How is he lacking?" Bilbo barely glanced in the others' directions as they began fleeing in groups, having seen enough.

"Why are none of them good enough for me, Thorin? Who is good enough for me, in your eyes, if not even Finn would be? Is anyone ever going to be? And do I not have the right to make that choice myself?"

Thorin sighed and lowered his eyes, looking defeated, which only added to Bilbo's confusion. "It matters not. I concede that who you choose as a partner is entirely your decision, and none of my business. If you wish to have this Finn as your bondmate, I will not disapprove."

"Considering we have not even thought of trading beads with one another, and have spoken only for a mere few hours altogether, I think speaking of us as bondmates is premature," Bilbo said dryly.

"Marry who you wish, Bilbo. I will not stop you again."

The last of the Dwarves in the room fled, closing the doors behind them, leaving them alone, and Bilbo moved closer, reaching out to turn Thorin's face toward him. When he saw the look in the king's eyes, he finally understood, and his anger died as quickly as it had flared. "Oh, Thorin, you great fool," he said, drawing him closer and rising up to press his mouth against Thorin's.

A rumble rose from deep inside Thorin and next thing Bilbo knew, he was swept up and deposited into Thorin's lap, the Dwarf's hands roaming over Bilbo's body while his tongue tasted every inch of Bilbo's mouth.

Bilbo gave back as good as he got. This was not something he'd ever dared dream of having in the light of day. Thorin was a king, and Bilbo so far beneath his station, he'd put the thought out of his mind as soon as it had reared its head. If sometimes, late at night or in the early morning, he fantasized about having Thorin for his own, it had always been his own business and simply a nice, wistful dream that would never come true.

After several minutes, Bilbo pulled back with a gasp, breathing through his nose no longer enough. "Why did you never say anything?" he asked, leaning his forehead against Thorin's. "You were going to let me leave Erebor."

"I thought you could only be happy back in your own land. We will do anything to make our Ones happy, even if it means letting them go," Thorin murmured.

"Idiot," Bilbo said fondly as he tilted his head to give Thorin another kiss. "In case you have not noticed, I am more than willing to accept your courtship overtures, so I better be seeing a courting bead sometime soon."

Chuckling, Thorin reached into his pocket and pulled out a mithril and sapphire bead. "Will this do?"

Bilbo swallowed heavily and took it in his hand. "It's beautiful."

"It was the bead of Durin VI. He had many, because his beard and mane were quite magnificent, and he sported many braids. Each King since has given one as the first token to the one he wishes to become their Queen, or in your case, the King's Consort."

"I am honored to receive such an heirloom," Bilbo said, studying the bead with interest. "Have you had it on you all this time?"

Thorin shook his head. "It was in a jewel box hidden in my rooms when the dragon came. Once I was able to move around, and the royal halls were deemed safe, I went back to my old rooms and searched for the box. I had a small hope I would at least be able to give it to you on your departure as a gesture of friendship. No one else would have ever been a recipient of it."

"If you had given it to me upon my departure, you'd likely still have me sobbing and clinging to your side, begging you to let me stay," Bilbo said, laughing a bit as he held up the bead. "Braid it into my hair?"

Bilbo knew that asking Thorin to do it instead of doing it himself was the ultimate gesture of acceptance, one that told Thorin that Bilbo willingly accepted not only his courtship, but the marriage proposal he would be offering at the end of their courtship. From what he had read, it was rarely done, even amongst those who thought of each other as their Ones.

With shaking hands, Thorin reached for his hair, on the right side of his head, near his ear. "It would be my pleasure."

Bilbo sighed contentedly as Thorin worked, the bead placed in the middle of his braid where it could be seen by all, and when Thorin had finished it off with a small leather tie, Bilbo snuggled up to him and kissed his neck. "Now that that is taken care of, and we can let your sister plan our wedding when she gets here in the spring, will you please take Marin off the night shifts and apologize and make amends to Nari? And make sure the rest know you're not going to gut them in their sleep if they so much as look at me? I would like to have some friends in the Mountain."

Chuckling, Thorin tightened his hold. "Consider it done. I will take care of it today."

"Good. Should we call for the others? I'm sure they would like breakfast. And Dáin is hiding on the balcony down the hall."



Thorin laughed. "We'll call for them in a moment. For now, I simply wish to hold you."

Bilbo relaxed against him, perfectly fine with that.

The End